

Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt

Pictures of Egyptian Mummies

In this gallery you can enjoy further selection of pictures of Egyptian mummies and related items. All mummy images are copyright of The Mummies Exhibition or Tutankhamun Exhibition in Dorchester UK.



The head the mummy of [Tutankhamun](#). Seen in the background is the magnificent golden funeral mask of the boy King. The majority of the death masks were made of gilded cartonage, however some pharaohs have had solid gold masks made for them. Only two such examples have survived - that of Tutankhamun and Psusennes.



Mummy of Tutankhamun.



Golden Mummy mask of an unnamed princess of the Middle Kingdom around 1900 BCE.

She wears a winged vulture headdress. This mask is a rare example of the gilded cartonnage items of this period. It would be placed over the head of the bandaged mummy before being placed in the coffin. These pictures of Egyptian mummies is a short preview of what is displayed in our Exhibition.



Golden coffin of king Nebukheperre Inyotref VII. 17th dynasty, 1600 BCE. It is a rare type of rishi coffin, made of gilded and painted wood.

The British Museum of London, England, has the largest and most comprehensive collection of ancient Egyptian material outside of Cairo. Its spectacular collection consists

of more than 100,000 objects. Displays include a gallery of monumental sculpture and the internationally famous collection of mummies and coffins.

Egyptian objects have formed part of the collections of the British Museum since its beginning. The original start of the Museum was to provide a home for objects left to the nation by Sir Hans Sloane when he died in 1753, about 150 of which were from Egypt. European interest in Egypt began to grow in earnest after the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798, particularly since Napoleon included scholars in his expedition who recorded a great deal about the ancient and mysterious country. After the British defeated the French in 1801, many antiquities which the French had collected were confiscated by the British Army and presented to the British Museum in the name of King George III in 1803. The most famous of these was the Rosetta Stone.

After Napoleon, Egypt came under the control of Mohammed Ali, who was determined to open the country to foreigners. As a result, European officials residing in Egypt began collecting antiquities. Britain's consul was Henry Salt, who amassed two collections which eventually formed an important core of the British Museum collection, and was supplemented by the purchase of a number of papyri.

Antiquities from excavations also came into the Museum in the later 1800's as a result of the work of the Egypt Exploration Fund (now Society). A major source of antiquities came from the efforts of E.A. Wallis Budge (Keeper 1886 -1924), who regularly visited Egypt and built up a wide-ranging collection of papyri and funerary material.

In May of 2003, the British Museum signed a landmark five-year collaborative agreement with the Bowers Museum of Santa Ana, California, to showcase its incredible collections and to provide a service to visitors and especially students who aren't able to travel to Britain. In April 2005, the Bowers Museum thus presented "Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt" featuring a spectacular collection of 140 objects from the British Museum. For your enjoyment, The History Place presents a slide show highlighting 14 items from the Bowers Museum exhibition.

About Egyptian Mummies

Mummies are one of the most characteristic aspects of ancient Egyptian culture. The preservation of the body was an essential part of the Egyptian funerary belief and practice. Mummification seems to have its origins in the late Predynastic period (over 3000 BC) when specific parts of the body were wrapped, such as the face and hands. It has been suggested that the process developed to reproduce the desiccating (drying) effects of the hot dry sand on a body buried within it.



The best literary account of the mummification process is given by the Ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who says that the entire process took 70 days. The internal organs, apart from the heart and kidneys, were removed via a cut in the left side. The organs were dried and wrapped, and placed in canopic jars, or later replaced inside the body. The brain was removed, often through the nose, and discarded. Bags of natron or salt were packed both inside and outside the body, and left for forty days until all the moisture had been removed. The body was then cleansed with aromatic oils and resins and wrapped with bandages, often household linen torn into strips.

In recent times, scientific analysis of mummies, by X-rays, CT scans, endoscopy and other processes has revealed a wealth of information about how individuals lived and died. It has been possible to identify medical conditions such as lung cancer, osteoarthritis and tuberculosis, as well as parasitic disorders such as schistosomiasis (bilharzia).

Mummification

The earliest ancient Egyptians buried their dead in small pits in the desert. The heat and dryness of the sand dehydrated the bodies quickly, creating lifelike and natural 'mummies' as seen here.





Later, the ancient Egyptians began burying their dead in coffins to protect them from wild animals in the desert.

However, they realized that bodies placed in coffins decayed because they were not exposed to the hot, dry sand of the desert.

Over many centuries, the ancient Egyptians developed a method of preserving bodies so they would remain lifelike.

The process included embalming the bodies and wrapping them in strips of linen. Today, we call this process mummification.

Egyptian Amulets

Egyptian amulets (ornamental charms) were worn by both the living and the dead. Some protected the wearer against specific dangers and others endowed him or her with special characteristics, such as strength or fierceness.

Amulets were often in the shape of animals, plants, sacred objects, or hieroglyphic symbols. The combination of shape, color and material were important to the effectiveness of an amulet.



Papyri (Egyptian scrolls) show that amulets were used in medicine, often in conjunction with poultices (a medicated dressing, often applied hot) or other preparations, and the

recitation of spells. Sometimes, the papyri on which the spells were written could also act as amulets, and were folded up and worn by the owner.

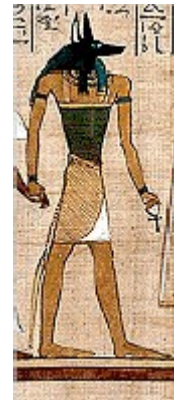
One of the most widely worn protective amulets was the wedjat eye: the restored eye of Horus. It was worn by the living, and often appeared on rings and as an element of necklaces. It was also placed on the body of the deceased during the mummification process to protect the incision through which the internal organs were removed.

Several of the spells in the Book of the Dead were intended to be spoken over specific amulets, which were then placed in particular places on the body of the deceased.

The scarab (beetle) was an important funerary amulet, associated with rebirth, and the heart scarab amulet prevented the heart from speaking out against the deceased.

Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptians believed in many different gods and goddesses -- each one with their own role to play in maintaining peace and harmony across the land.



Some gods and goddesses took part in creation, some brought the flood every year, some offered protection, and some took care of people after they died. Others were either local .gods who represented towns, or minor gods who represented plants or animals
Ancient Egyptians believed that it was important to recognize and worship these gods and .goddesses so that life continued smoothly

Egyptian Shabti Figures: Servants in the Afterlife

Shabti figures developed from the servant figures common in tombs of the Middle Kingdom (about 2040-1782 BC). They were shown as mummified like the deceased, with their own coffin, and were inscribed with a spell to provide food for their master or mistress in the afterlife.



From the New Kingdom (about 1550-1070 BC) onward, the deceased was expected to take part in the maintenance of the 'Field of Reeds,' where he or she would live for eternity. This meant undertaking agricultural labor, such as plowing, sowing, and reaping the crops. The shabti figure became regarded as a servant figure that would carry out heavy work on behalf of the deceased. The figures were still mummiform (in the shape of mummies), but now held agricultural implements such as hoes. They were inscribed with a spell which made them answer when the deceased was called to work. The name 'shabti' means 'answerer.'

From the end of the New Kingdom, anyone who could afford to do so had a workman for every day of the year, complete with an overseer figure for each gang of ten laborers. This gave a total of 401 figures, though many individuals had several sets. These vast collections of figures were often of extremely poor quality, uninscribed and made of mud rather than the faience which had been popular in the New Kingdom.

MUMMY MASK
Cartonnage, painted and gilded
Late Ptolemaic Period or early Roman Period



A very important part of the outer trappings of a mummy was a mask, placed over the head to provide an idealized image of the deceased as a resurrected being. These masks were frequently fashioned from cartonnage, a cheap and lightweight material made from layers of linen stiffened with glue and plaster. The mask played a crucial symbolic role, for it signified the elevation of the dead person to a higher plane of existence in the afterlife. He or she was believed to attain a status of equality with the gods, and this association was conveyed in particular through the symbolic use of color and precious materials. This mask exemplifies all the classic features of such funerary trappings. The face, collar and wig are extensively covered with gold leaf, and the wide-open eyes convey a sense of vitality and alertness appropriate to one who has entered upon a new life. It is, however, a purely idealized image and is in no sense a true likeness of the deceased.

COFFIN OF A CHILD

Wood

Probably early Ptolemaic Period, about 300 BC



Infant mortality was high in ancient Egypt, and probably affected the families of the wealthy no less than those of the poor. During the pharaonic period relatively few children seem to have been buried with the full paraphernalia of mummification and elaborate coffins, probably because of the great expense this would have involved. In this instance, however, the child of a wealthy couple was sent into the afterlife with a finely carved wooden coffin. In its shape and proportions this small coffin resembles the full-size anthropoid sarcophagi of the Late Period and Ptolemaic Period. These were usually made of stone, and the present coffin is exceptional in that it's made of wood.

WOODEN MODEL FUNERARY BOAT

Sycamore fig wood

12th Dynasty, about 1900 BC



This painted wooden model represents a funerary boat bearing a mummy on a bier beneath a canopy. To the port side of the mummy stands the small figure of a man, holding in his left hand a partially unrolled papyrus. He is presumably a lector-priest, who would read the ritual text written on the papyrus over the body. There are actually some traces of a text on the papyrus, but it has not been possible to read it. Fore and aft of the mummy stand two female mourners; these women are usually representations of Isis and Nephthys, the sisters of Osiris and archetypal mourners. At the rear, between a pair of steering oars, the helmsman is squatting. On the deck are also a small offering table and a couple of pots. Actual size: Length 77.5 cm; Width 13.4 cm; Height 6 cm.

STELA OF BESENMUT

Sycamore fig wood, paint on plaster

Middle 26th Dynasty, about 600 BC



This round-topped stela is divided into three sections. At the top is a large curved hieroglyph representing the sky, below which is a winged sun-disc from which hang a pair of uraeus serpents. The hieroglyphs identify this as a representation of "he of Behdet," a term for the (originally) sky god Horus; this decoration is extremely common in the semi-circular "lunette" at the top of stelae. The second and third parts are divided into left and right sides, with a scene above and a text relating to that scene below. On the left, Besenmut stands in adoration of the god Atum, represented in his usual form of a man .wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt

FIGURINE OF ISIS AND HORUS *Faience*

30th Dynasty or early Ptolemaic Period, 4th-3rd Century BC



Many figurines showing Isis and Horus were made to be dedicated to one or both deities as votive offerings. A large number of examples in bronze are known, but specimens in faience such as this are less common. Here the workmanship is detailed and fine. The rich blue-green color of the glaze has been offset by a purplish coloring applied to the wig of Isis. The goddess wears on her head the image of a seat or throne (the hieroglyphic sign for her name). She clasps her right breast with one hand and with the other hand supports the head of her son to suckle him. Horus sits passively on his mother's knee; his head is shaven but for the curled sidelock of hair, denoting his youthfulness.

GOLD COBRA WEARING THE RED CROWN OF LOWER EGYPT

Sheet Gold

Late Period, after 600 BC



The cobra was a much feared and respected creature in Egypt. It possessed many different associations, particularly with royalty, and use of the symbol meant that the dangerous power of the cobra was always magically turned to the benefit of the user. Thus the king's uraeus, worn on his brow, is referred to in some battle texts as destroying his enemies and giving the king power over them. Images of Egyptian gods also bear the rearing cobra. This cobra could be interpreted as either Hathor who, in the guise of the eye of Re, was sent to destroy mankind for being disrespectful, or as Sekhmet who was the fiery weapon of the god Re and who could also be sent out to destroy the enemies of the gods. Re bequeathed this gift of potential destruction, represented by the rearing cobra, to his descendants, the kings of Egypt. Actual size: Length 13.6 cm.

UPPER PART OF THE STATUE OF A MAN

Limestone

Mid 18th Dynasty, about 1500 BC



The name of the owner of this statue is regrettably not preserved, as only the very beginning of an inscription has survived. This text would in full have expressed a wish for offerings to be left for the owner, perhaps in a temple. It shows a man seated with (originally) both his hands placed on his lap. The style of the statue with its long simple wig, short formal beard, and faint confident smile is typical of the middle of the 18th Dynasty, perhaps of the reign of Thutmose III or thereabouts. Note the so-called 'negative space' between the upper arms and the body, as the arms and legs of Egyptian statues in stone are rarely separated from the main block which forms the body of the object. Although statues such as this were usually brightly painted, there are no traces of color .surviving

WOODEN FOLDING STOOL

Wood inlaid with ivory, with leather seat

New Kingdom, probably 18th Dynasty , about 1500 BC



The squat folding stool is a piece of furniture known from tomb-paintings in Egypt from before the New Kingdom. This beautifully made example is of a type which appears to have been restricted to the 18th and 19th Dynasties, characterized by legs terminating in duck heads. It is composed of three elements. The well cut and finished base rails are cylindrical and without further decoration. The folding legs are the most attractive part of the stool, for they each terminate in a head of a duck or goose. These heads are carefully carved, with the eyes and nostrils inlaid with ivory; there are also long thin triangular pieces of ivory inlaid into the neck of the bird.

LARGE WEDJAT EYE, GLAZED COMPOSITION

Faience

Third Intermediate Period, 1069-525 BC



A wedjat eye of polychrome faience: the eye and the highly stylized eyebrow are of blue faience, while the area between the angled bar of the eye and the eye itself is filled with red faience. The cornea and iris are white and black respectively. Some of the larger examples of such amulets exhibit ornate decoration in the exaggerated area between the eye and the eyebrow; in the present instance there are three rows of tiny cats. This large amulet required two rings for suspension at the top. Actual size: Length 8.9 cm; Width 7.2 cm; Thickness 1.0 cm.

UPPER PART OF A STATUE OF OSIRIS *Granodiorite*

Ptolemaic Period, 305-30 BC



This fragment, representing the head and upper body of Osiris, probably formed part of a standing statue of the deity. The god is dressed in the usual enveloping and close-fitting robe, and holds his arms crossed on his chest; in his fists are the symbols of kingship, the crook and the flail. On his chin is the conventional divine beard, the end of which is broken off. He wears the atef crown, which resembled the white crown of Upper Egypt, with a feather on both sides, and a pair of ram's horns jutting out at the base. In artistic depictions this crown is most frequently worn by Osiris, although it can be shown with other gods and appears on the head of the king at times; its associations are with rebirth and renewal.

GOLD RING OF SHESHONQ

26th Dynasty, 6th Century BC



This large gold ring of Sheshonq is of a shape common for such rings in the Late Period, a shape which more or less totally replaced the earlier stirrup-shaped type. The lozenge shaped bezel is so thick that the back had to be cut away to accommodate the finger of the wearer; the shank and the bezel were made in separate molds and joined together. It is incised with the name of Sheshonq and his title "Chief Steward of the divine adoratrice." The bezel could be pressed into mud to seal documents and objects. Besides this functional aspect, the ring was no doubt as much (if not more) worn as a mark of Sheshonq's status and wealth. The name Sheshonq is of Libyan origin, belonging to several kings of the Libyan Period, but it became popular among Egyptians from that time onward. Actual size: Diameter 3.0 cm; Length 3.4 cm.

CORN MUMMY IN WOODEN COFFIN *Linen wrappings, wax, painted wood*

Late Period, 664-305 BC



Osiris, supreme god of resurrection, was closely associated with the life-giving forces of nature, particularly the Nile and vegetation. Above all, he was connected with germinating grain. The emergence of a living, growing, plant from the apparently dormant seed hidden within the earth was regarded by the Egyptians as a metaphor for the rebirth of a human being from the lifeless husk of the corpse. The concept was translated into physical form by the fashioning of images of Osiris out of earth and grain. These "corn-mummies" were composed of sand or mud, mixed with grains of barley. As in this instance, the "mummy" is sometimes wrapped in linen bandages and may possess a finely detailed mask of wax, representing the face of Osiris.

SHABTI OF AMENWAHSU *Steatite*

19th Dynasty, about 1295-1186 BC

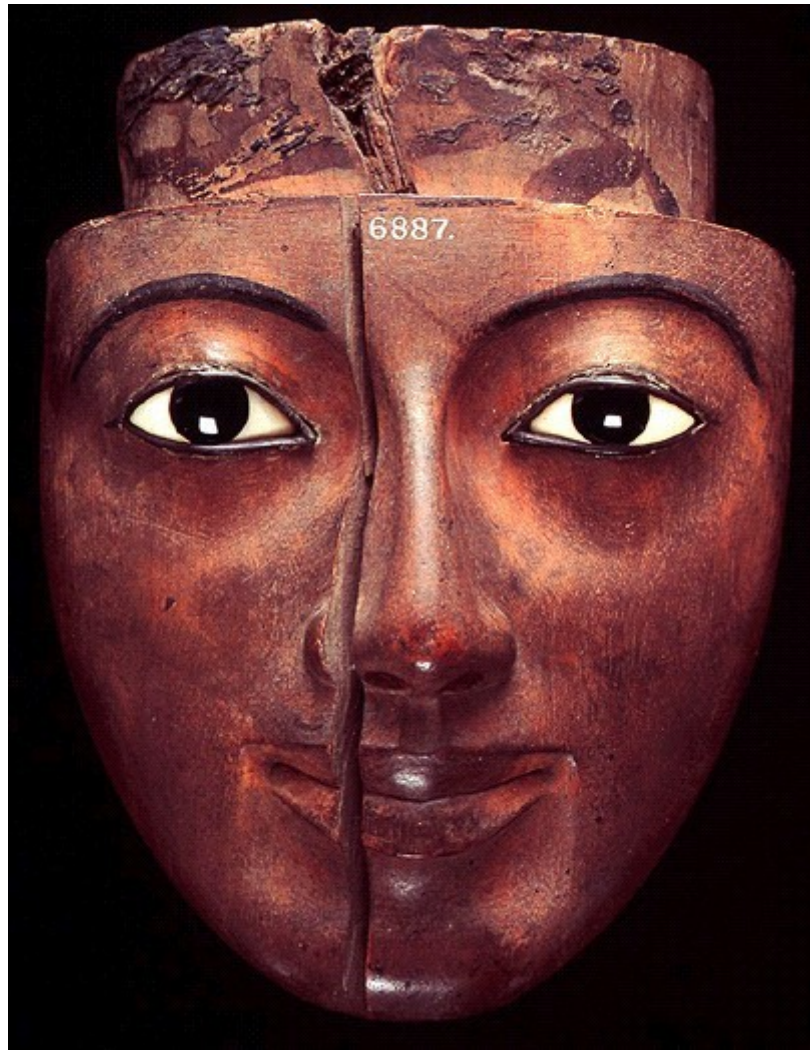


In the later 18th Dynasty there was a move away from the fashion of depicting the dead as mummies and towards representing them as living beings dressed in formal clothes. This led to the creation of coffins, sarcophagi and shabtis in this form, although the more traditional shrouded image continued to be used at the same time. This shabti of the Overseer of the Granary, Amenwahu, exemplifies this trend. He wears the curled double wig and the pleated kilt with prominent apron that were fashionable dress for high officials at the time. His arms and legs are free from the confining mummy-wrappings. He holds a hoe in each hand and has a grain-basket slung over his left shoulder.

FACE OF A COFFIN

Wood, eyes of obsidian and ivory set in bronze sockets

18th Dynasty, c. 1400 BC or later



The chief purpose of ancient Egyptian funerary rituals (including mummification) was to enable the individual to pass from the earthly life to a new existence, in which he or she would possess the attributes of divine beings. The outward appearance of the transfigured dead would reflect their new, god-like status. For this reason all images of the dead, whether mummy-masks, anthropoid coffins or free-standing statues, were idealized, representing the individual as eternally youthful and free from all physical disabilities or blemishes. This face once formed part of the lid of a mummiform coffin